

## **Finding Of No Significant Impact**

**(FONSI)**

DOI-BLM-CO-300-2012-0012-EA

Based on review of the Environmental Assessment (EA) and supporting documents, I have determined that the proposed project is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below:

### **RATIONALE:**

**Context:** The proposed project area is approximately 5 miles south of Del Norte, in Rio Grande County, Colorado. The surface estate is privately owned, overlying federal minerals that are subject to oil and gas development and leased by the applicant.

The general area can be defined as a rural subdivision serviced by county roads. The landscape is typified by open scrub covered gently rolling hillsides of mostly native vegetation, consisting primarily of grasses and shrubs with the occasional piñon or juniper tree. The subdivision consisting of large 35 acre lots has been developed. Successful oil and gas development has not occurred near the project area; one plugged and abandoned well is within a mile of the project area

The area has been altered from its original form by farming and ranching operations, roads, fences, and houses. The temporary infrastructure needed to develop one oil and gas well site would be minor given the existing uses in the area.

### **Intensity:**

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the San Francisco Creek APD decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

**Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse:** There would be minor, temporary impacts to air quality and wildlife from the proposed wells, most of which would occur during the drilling phase. There are potential impacts to groundwater resources; however, such impacts should not occur if strict drilling requirements and BLM goldbook standards are followed. Beneficial impacts from the action would be the potential for productive wells that could have local, state,

and national economic impact. Additionally, data gathered from the drilling will help resource managers have a better idea of the composition of the Conejos Formation and other geologic resources in the San Francisco Creek area.

**Public health and safety:** The proposed action will have minor, short term impacts to air quality during the construction phase. The applicant has proposed measures to limit the impact of traffic associated with the project for both public health and safety and wildlife concerns.

**Unique characteristics of the geographic area:** The Environmental Analysis evaluated the proposed action and determined that no unique geographic characteristics, such as Wild and Scenic Rivers, prime or unique farmlands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concerns, designated wilderness study areas or lands with wilderness characteristics, were present.

**Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial:** The potential for controversy associated with the effects of the proposed action is low. There is no disagreement or controversy among interdisciplinary team members over the nature of the effects on the resource values by the proposed action.

**Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks:** The drilling of oil and gas wells has occurred over the last century. While oil and gas development itself can be controversial, the effects of such developments and risks involved (such as uncertain drilling conditions) are neither unique nor unknown.

**Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts:** The proposed APD will be limited to standard construction procedures associated with pad/road construction that are common for oil and gas development on BLM-managed split estate leases. There are no aspects of the current proposal that are precedent setting.

**Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts:** As an exploratory well with no additional proposed developments associated with the proposed action, there are no other known actions related to this well that would have cumulative significant impacts. The only other significant element that contributes to cumulative impacts in the area is the development of the sub-division. The addition of the well would contribute in a small way to these cumulative impacts that would become almost insubstantial after reclamation.

**Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places:** No historic properties or sites eligible for listing would be affected by this project.



**Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat:** There are fifteen species in this analysis, based on presence within or adjacent to the project area, life history information, or suitable/potential habitat within or adjacent to the project area. These species include the Gunnison prairie dog, Northern leopard frog, milk snake, bald eagle, ferruginous hawk, peregrine falcon, mountain plover, burrowing owl, Brewer's sparrow, fringed myotis, Townsend's big-eared bat, big free-tail bat, Rio Grande cutthroat trout, Rio Grande sucker, and Rio Grande chub. The Proposed Action, while limited in size and duration and therefore limited in terms of its local impact on TES species, adds to the cumulative effect of habitat loss and decreased habitat quality that is occurring in this general area for TES species. With the implementation of the proposed mitigation measures and design features it is anticipated that environmental consequences of displacement of wildlife species and loss of habitat would affect some individuals, but not impact the continued viability of any species.

**Any effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment:** The proposed action conforms with the provisions of NEPA (U.S.C. 4321-4346) and FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and is compliant with the Clean Water Act and The Clean Air Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Endangered Species Act.

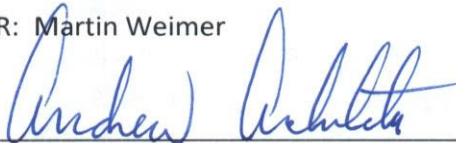
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DATE: 1/6/2014

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: \_\_\_\_\_



Andrew Archuleta, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 6 January 2014